

Freedom within organizations

Ankita Shreeram | August, 2011

What comes first, organizational culture or individual tastes and preferences? And is there a way to integrate the two in a satisfying manner?



Employee autonomy

We are all well aware that a team cannot function without a framework of rules and regulations. However, every individual has his or her own way of doing things and the better these preferences can be accommodated, the greater is that individual's comfort in handling his or her work. "According to us the freedom to think is equivalent to freedom to execute. Every employee has the room to think and an opportunity to execute them. However, the most important factor here is timing. The IT services industry is vulnerable to external factors, hence to enforce newer ideas may not be feasible immediately. We are in the age of 'intrapreneurship' and ideas are always welcome for development. At CSS Corp, suggestions for internal developments are taken very seriously. However, we also tell our employees that with this freedom comes the responsibility as well," says **Omprakash Sarvanan**, global delivery head for Enterprise services support, **CSS Corp**.

"The autonomy that an employee enjoys varies across organizations. At SAP Labs we have created a culture of flexibility and independency as we believe that employees are more engaged and their productivity enhances when they have more autonomy and greater flexibility. SAP Labs has some of the most employee friendly policies in the industry including work from home and flexible work timing. We believe that enhanced employee satisfaction means lower attrition and turnover, which in turn promotes sustained organizational productivity and cost savings," explains Akshita Shetty Kishore, business partner, HR, SAP Labs India.

Reception of ideas

Organizations are becoming more receptive to newer and better ways of doing things even if the suggestions come from lower rungs. "Employees who are actually executing tasks are often considered the best person's to suggest on process improvement pertaining to their areas. All successful organizations treat it as a key source for inputs on process improvement, as it solves the actual issues faced by an employee/team keeping the organizational constraints and culture in mind. In our organization, we have the EPG (Engineering Process Group) which has a primary goal of process improvement within the organization. All staff is given equal rights to suggest their ideas on process improvements directly to EPG," says Partha Patnaik, AVP- HR & Admin, Four Soft.

Making way

So how can organizations make space for individual tastes? "Today HR team of various organizations are coming up with innovative ideas to cater to the personal tastes. Organizing food festivals in the cafeteria with menu based on cuisine from different regions of the country or going out of the usual meal timings to facilitate food for colleagues at Ramzan is something which has become common but was not so in the past. Having an employee concierge which attends to individual employee's needs is a step ahead and shows we are moving in the right direction. However to reach there for all will take some time and genuine faith in its significance," suggests Kishore Ramola, director of human resources, Swissôtel Kolkata.

"Cultural fit is one strong factor we look into as we hire people at NCR. There has to be alignment with shared values. Individuals are given the space to operate but it has to be overall within the cultural context of the Organization," cautions Suman Rudra, India HR Leader, NCR India. "Minimally and as long as it does not impose on the fabric of the system/business and it does not tread upon other the sentiments of other people working in the organization," agrees TN Shekar, CEO, LIVIA.

Thus, individual preferences cannot compromise organizational norms and culture as it is the glue that holds the whole team together. However, the team is all the more stronger when allowed some space for individuality.

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